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THE ACANTHUS SCROLL.

By CONSTANTINE UHDE.

In our 6th Part of the present year, is to be found a brief description of the principal forms of the acanthus leaf in historical development. In the following observations we will attempt to illustrate by a few examples the process of development in the case of the acanthus scroll.

It will be self-evident that the general type of the scroll must correspond with that of the leaf in the periods referred to. It would therefore be superfluous again to bring forward the historical element. By a comparison of the form of the leaves in Part 6 with that of the scroll in the corresponding periods, their mutual dependence will be easily established. We will therefore confine ourselves in the present article to a consideration of the characteristic varieties in the different artistic creations.

The acanthus ornament is generally found as a decoration in friezes and borders or some other prominent part, intended to be marked by a certain richness of appearance. It is but seldom seen independently as an architectural feature by itself, though it occurs as such in the Grecian memorial stones and in the crowning ornament of the Choragic monument of Lysicrates in Athens.

As a rule, the acanthus ornament is marked by three principal dispositions in the movements of its lines which are regulated by the place and position of its application. In Fig. 1 the ornament is formed by volutes or scrolls springing to the right and left from a central rectilinear stem. From the decidedly vertical character of this form, and the exactly similar distribution of the main lines on each side of the parent stem, this disposition is mostly employed for the decoration of pillars and upright panels. On the other hand, when the scrolls flow off alternately on either side to the right and left of a continuous line, Figs. 2 and 3, they are employed both in a vertical and horizontal direction. As constant characteristics of the acanthus ornament are found the adoption of a continuous stem throwing off tangential

spiral curves or scrolls on either side, the swelling of the stem at the point of junction with the turned back, overlapping leaf by which the scroll is in a great measure covered, as well as a gradual diminution of the scroll and the accompanying forms, to the point, where it is terminated usually by encircling a flower. In the mediæval, Romanesque and Gothic forms these peculiarities have entirely disappeared; the scroll is equally thick from beginning to end, without any swelling at the junction of stem and stem, and the leaves springing from slender branches entirely lose the characteristic feature of the acanthus.

To the most beautiful examples of the acanthus scroll belongs undoubtedly that of the ornament surmounting the monument of Lysicrates, Fig. 4, which is distinguished both by the beauty of its lines and its exquisite modelling. In the Grecian form the continuous stem generally appears deeply channelled or hollowed out towards the middle, the swelling at the point of junction but feebly, if at all developed, the turned back leaf sharply cut, and the toothings of the leaves also deeply channelled throughout. By frequent repetitions the leaves on the junctions of stem and stem become more richly treated as they approach the springing of the group than at the ends. The spiral scroll encircles no flower or bud at its end. The painted form of the Grecian scroll, Fig. 5, well known to us by the paintings on the so called Etruscan vases, bears much resemblance to Fig. 4 in the simplicity of its arrangement. The modelling or channelling of the stem is expressed by black lines. A very primitive kind of decoration, intended to produce a certain degree of plastic effect and shading, is to be seen in the application of white on the yellow ground of earthenware, a method of decoration belonging to the decline of Grecian art, which may be pointed out as the first stage of those painted forms which led to the highly important productions to be seen in the Pompeian wall-

paintings and in the later period of the Renaissance. Whether indeed the ornament painted on the surface ought to be so executed as to lose entirely the character of surface decoration, and to acquire the appearance of relief, by shading in different colors, is a question which we will not here enter upon or discuss.

The Roman acanthus scroll is formed in an entirely different manner. The simple and elegant lines of the Grecian conception are sacrificed to a pretentious richness. The swellings of the stem and the flowers are here the principal points, and destroy by their cross lines the graceful movement of the continuous stem, which is completely lost by the encroachment of the leaves. The ornament consists of a scroll growing out of another scroll encircling a flower or a group of leaves; the junctions of stem and stem are marked by strings of pearls wound round it, or of calices with turned back leaves, Fig. 6. While the Greeks always represented the acanthus scroll with the flowers and leaves in profile, the Romans on the contrary adopt an oblique projection. Thus the Grecian leaf is only half visible, as it were in side-elevation, the flowers only in ground plan or also in profile, while the Romans show the whole, one half in projection, the other flattened out to the surface below it. So also the flowers and birds are conceived, and represented as lying obliquely on the ground. This manner of representation differs indeed from the strictly Grecian; still it is not to be denied that this aspect is most especially suited to the relief, inasmuch as it shows the flat of the leaf to advantage, and offers a powerful contrast by the freely projecting other half. The best periods of Art have accepted this form of an ornamental object both in relief and painting.

The Grecian form of the acanthus scroll has found a peculiar application in Byzantine architecture. Fig. 7 gives such a specimen in a frieze of the fifth century. The stem itself is completely lost, only the running foliage, with the alternating movement from a continuous line is preserved. The swellings of the stems also, and the recurring rhythmical movement from them have disappeared, and given place to a monotonous repetition of three broad-toothed acute-pointed leaves, bevelled at the edge and drilled at the several springings of the teeth with deep holes. The early Christian and Romanesque form is similar to the Roman and scarcely to be distinguished from it, though for the most part it is rougher in the execution, for which reason we have given no specimen of it here.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the acanthus loses still more its importance, and is replaced by forms which have scarcely a shadow of resemblance to the original motive. In Fig. 8 the overlapping leaf-cup at the point of junction which characterizes the Roman acanthus is still preserved. The scrolls are twisted like ropes, the acanthus leaf springing from the continuous stem disappears, and smaller leaves are distributed indifferently along the whole length of the scroll.

The Romanesque ornament, Fig. 9, is not very dis-

similar to a flowing band winding upwards and downwards in manifold spirals with leaves and berries alternately joined on to it, no trace of the acanthus remaining, and must be considered as a purely Romanesque and independently conceived running ornament.

The Italian Gothic again takes up the motive of the acanthus, when it has scarcely disappeared from Italian ground, and makes frequent use of it in combination with the early Christian mosaic patterns in the interior decoration of palaces and churches, as for example in the celebrated wallpaintings of the upper chapel of the public palace in Siena, Fig. 10, and in the St. Croce church at Florence. A distinct naturalistic feature characterises the whole ornament. The vegetable types, which enter into the composition in great variety, are for the most part painted in their natural colors on a colored ground.

Fig. 11 is a highly interesting example of a hinge in wrought iron from the last period of the Gothic in Germany from the church at Berchtesgaden. In this hinge the character of the acanthus is distinctly marked, recalling the Grecian painted form, and is treated in quite an original manner appropriate to the ironwork. Although the hinges which now appear in their place seem of more modern origin, they are still executed in faithful imitation of the old originals.

Fig. 12 is of nearly the same period: a French specimen of a boldly carved ornament filling the deep hollow of a cornice, which still bears the Gothic character of that remarkable art-period in which Gothic and Renaissance motives were strangely intermingled.

A remarkable specimen with a special application of the acanthus is found in the impost of the eastern apse of the church of S. Mark in Venice, which evidently originates in the end of the sixteenth century, Fig. 13. In contrast to the plastic rendering, the underside of the overlapping leaf is partly seen in this work which is executed either in color or mosaic. The scrolls which are here kept very thin, and which traverse one another in many complicated involutions, are united to the leaf without any swelling or interruption.

We must once more refer to Fig. 16, in our 6th Part, as one of the most beautiful specimens of the acanthus scroll in combination with flowers and buds. The beauty of the lines, the appropriate alternation of the bold and the delicate in the projecting parts, the relief combined with a correct study of nature and nobly conceived conventional forms at once strike the eye, and render this specimen worthy of imitation in every respect.

It would not be consistent with the object of these remarks, to bring forward in addition a quantity of examples from the abundantly productive period of the decline of the Renaissance, which had also distinguished itself by incredible specimens of utter want of taste, and neglect of natural laws. One single specimen, Fig. 14, may here suffice, belonging to the best of those epochs, and offering a good example of the works executed in iron which so frequently occur in the last century.